FILM CLIPS

A look inside Hollywood and the movies.

WHO TO CALL?

Today's Cast: Stone, Streisand, Levinson

"If you cast wrong, it's not an easy day," admitted director Barry Levinson, who with Oliver Stone and Barbra Streisand addressed a recent Directors Guild of America seminar. During the course of the 2½-hour discussion, they shared, among other tidbits, some of the agonizing that went into casting Oscar nominees "Bugsy," "JFK" and "Prince of Tides."

Levinson said he was "amazed" at the number of people who turned down various roles in "Bugsy." The part of gangster Meyer Lansky, in fact—for which Ben Kingsley received a best supporting actor Oscar nomination—wasn't filled until a week before the shoot.

"I knew that Kingsley was a brilliant actor," Levinson recalls. "But could this guy . . . Gandhi . . . play a New York Jew? It took a leap of faith to believe he could deliver the accent and the character. I wanted him to read for the part, but he was the one who suggested it. Other actors of his stature wouldn't have put themselves on the line, but he understood my dilemma."

Oliver Stone recounted, quasi-tongue-in-cheek, the difficulty of finding a 6-foot-7 actor to play Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney on whose investigations "JFK" was based. Since he couldn't cast according to physical type, the director said, he went with his gut. Kevin Costner was his choice.

"I like his small ears—don't you love those small ears?" Stone queried, flashing a gap-toothed grin. "I needed someone to anchor the movie, and you can watch Kevin for three hours. People think he has integrity and honesty—because he does."

Barbra Streisand didn't hesitate when asked if she always thought of herself playing Susan Lowenstein, the female lead in "Prince of Tides."

"Yes," she shot back. "Who else could I get to play a New York Jewish psychologist?" (Stone pointed to Levinson, who as it happens, played a therapist in his own movie "Rain Man.")

"Anyhow," Streisand continued when the laughs subsided, "I couldn't have gotten the picture made if I wasn't in it. I certainly wouldn't have gotten to direct."

Nick Nolte's name popped into her head after Robert Redford, who had initially intended to play the role, backed out in favor of "Havana." "I ran every one of Nick's films and realized he hadn't done any love scenes since 'Rich Man, Poor Man.' He sees himself as a character actor rather than a romantic lead and obviously wasn't comfortable with sexuality. Still, I saw a certain pain behind his eyes and almost a mistrust of women . . . which was essential.

"I thought he'd be terrific," Streisand said of the best actor nominee. "But one studio actually turned us down on account of Nick." —*Elaine Dutka*

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Film Clips

Continued from previous page

Anyway, if you can't get enough of those terrifying giant pods in the 1956 "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" and the 1978 remake, don't worry. Version No. 3, titled just "Body Snatchers," is currently filming in Selma, Ala.

According to co-screenwriter Stuart Gordon ("Re-Animator"), it's more of a remake than a sequel.

"We realized that it's been 14 years since the last 'Body Snatchers' movie and that there's a whole new audience that really knows nothing about the first two films," says Gordon. "This one doesn't depend on knowing about the first two movies. In a sense, it's a second remake. That's what it evolved into."

Producer Robert Solo, who also produced the 1978 film, agrees. "It's similar to what they've done with 'Alien,' " he says. "It always runs on a parallel track, but the characters are different. The set of circumstances are different, but the mythology is the same."

Solo says he optioned the rights to the latest version several years ago; the license he had to make the 1978 Philip Kaufman version was only for one picture. "I had to go back and acquire a new option for a remake or sequel." According to Solo, Warner Bros., which will distribute the latest version, now owns the rights to novelist Jack Finney's book, "Body Snatchers," published in the early '50s. Originally Allied Artists, which made the 1956 version that starred Kevin McCarthy, owned the rights until Lorimar bought their film library. Subsequently, those rights ended up at Warners when that studio absorbed Lorimar.

The latest version, directed by Abel Ferrara ("King of New York") and budgeted at around $12 million, involves an EPA scientist (Terry Kinney) who gets assigned to oversee the cleanup of hazardous waste on a military base in Selma. Accompanying the scientist to the location is his wife—played by Meg Tilly—and two children. The fun begins when many of the once-normal local citizenry begin to get that blank look about them, and fear and paranoia take over everybody else.

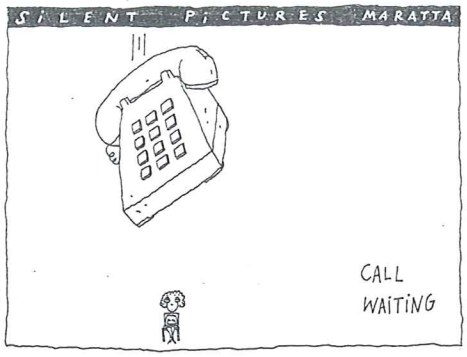
Gordon says that each "Body Snatchers" film has tended to reflect the nation's current climate. The original novel and director Don Siegel's film were a metaphor for the McCarthy witch hunts, he points out, while the 1978 "Body Snatchers" took aim at '70s psychobabble. And the latest installment? "It's about the destruction of a family by the pod people," he says. "It taps into the current paranoia of what's happening to the nuclear family."

As for the pesky pods themselves, Gordon says they'll be even more frightening this time. "In this film, although the pod people will look like humans on the outside, on the inside they'll be nothing like humans," says Gordon. "If you were to cut one open, the internal workings would be more like a vegetable or plant." Gordon also says that the film will take use advanced special effects techniques, including the computer-generated technique used extensively in "Terminator 2."

—Andy Marx

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LEGENDS

David Lean's Last Project Still Going

"Nostromo," the $43-million international epic that was to be directed by Sir David Lean, seemed to have died with the legendary director last April 16. Or did it?

Although TriStar, which had committed $7 million in exchange for the North American distribution rights, has "no more involvement in the project" according to a company spokesman, Lean's producer Serge Silberman "is producing the film [which] is going ahead," Lean's widow, Sandra, said from her London home this week.

Based on the 1904 Joseph Conrad novel, "Nostromo" tells a story of greed in a fictitious Central American country. Lean had been working on the script since 1987 with his "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Doctor Zhivago" collaborator Robert Bolt after first writing a version with Christopher Hampton.

According to Lean biographer Stephen M. Silverman, the cast included Dennis Quaid, Julian Sands, Isabella Rossellini, Irene Papas, Paul Scofield and Anthony Quinn. No word yet as to whether they would still be involved.

When Lean died, TriStar canceled the production and, after some negotiation, rights reverted back to Paris-based producer Silberman (Kurosawa's "Ran"), who could not be reached for comment.

Sandra Lean said "no comment" when asked who might direct; there are reports that Francis Ford Coppola or Martin Scorsese are favored. Spokespeople for both directors declined comment.

If the film comes back to life, Lean's widow said, "I'm going to be involved because I watched David [preparing] it for six years. I was with him every moment when he wrote the script and was trying to get it off the ground. It's a fire in me to get this film done.'

—Andy Marx